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**THE SOVIET AIR ASSAULT BRIGADE:
VERTICAL DIMENSION OF THE
OPERATIONAL MANEUVER GROUP**

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL HERMAN S. HEATH

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THE SOVIET AIR ASSAULT BRIGADE:
VERTICAL DIMENSION OF THE
OPERATIONAL MANEUVER GROUP

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

Lieutenant Colonel Herman S. Heath, AV

Colonel Roger M. Jaroch
Project Advisor

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THE SOVIET AIR ASSAULT BRIGADE:
VERTICAL DIMENSION OF THE
OPERATIONAL MANEUVER GROUP

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1980s, the Soviet Union has increasingly focused on conducting a conventional-only war against NATO instead of initiating hostilities with nuclear strikes as appeared to be their approach in the early 1970s.¹ This has resulted in the Soviets placing a great deal of emphasis on the development of equipment, force structure and operational concepts that stress mobility, surprise and deep maneuver to fight in the enemy's rear, ahead of the march columns of the first echelon divisions, armies and fronts. The introduction of division or army/corps size Operational Maneuver Groups (OMG) at army and front level testifies to the Soviet commitment to conduct offensive operations throughout the depths of NATO from the outset of hostilities.

Coinciding with the development of the OMG concept has been the growth and development of Soviet heliborne operations in support of ground force operations. This has been highlighted by the establishment of over 20 air assault brigades and battalions within the fronts and armies.² These forces are complimented with helicopter assets at army and front level by the establishment and decentralization of Soviet Army Aviation. The employment of these highly mobile and capable air assault forces operating in support of army-and/or front-level OMGs committed along several axis into NATO's Central Region presents profound

security implications for NATO rear battle planners.

It is the purpose of this study to examine the history, organization, capabilities and operational considerations for employment of Soviet air assault forces. Additionally, this study will address the prospective missions, roles and limitations of these units in support of army-and front-level operations as well as the implications they present for NATO.

BACKGROUND

Prior to the 1960s, the Soviets experimented with heliborne assault operations using Soviet airborne troops as they were considered to be the most suitable for helicopter transport. This was due mainly to their training in air assault operations, their relatively light equipment and lesser logistic requirements.³ With the introduction of transport helicopters with greater lift capabilities, Soviet planners turned their attention to the use of regular motorized rifle (MR) troops for heliborne assaults. Soviet experiments with these non-airborne units in heliborne operations convinced them that the employment of these troops in combat was not only feasible, but represented an extremely valuable and untapped means of taking key objectives well ahead of the advancing divisions, armies and front.⁴

The Soviet use of motorized rifle troops in conducting heliborne assaults continues to be a standard Soviet practice.⁵ In high readiness areas such as East Germany and Afghanistan, and

possibly elsewhere, one motorized rifle battalion in each division or separate brigade is trained in heliborne operations.⁶ This ensures the tactical commanders at the division level have organic heliborne assault forces to secure key terrain in front of, and on the flanks of, the advancing ground forces.⁷

Throughout the 1960s, Soviet military planners followed the development and employment of airmobile forces in Vietnam by the United States and gained a growing appreciation of the combat potential represented by this concept. Soviet interest was further increased as they realized a need for this new capability to solve the border clashes they were having with China in the late 1960s. They required the mobility the helicopter provided to concentrate limited forces at the right place and time along the border.⁸ This requirement brought about changes in Soviet heliborne doctrine and force structure in the 1970s with the addition of two new types of units to exploit the combat possibilities offered by helicopters.⁹ The first was the formation of airmobile brigades in the early 1970s. These units consisted of light infantry troops which do not use armored vehicles, have limited firepower and depend on helicopters for mobility.¹⁰ The airmobile brigades were followed in the late 1970s by the deployment of air assault brigades which have increased mobility and firepower and are suitable for deep operations on the European battlefield.¹¹

The peacetime subordination of these brigades to the Military Districts or Groups of Forces, and to the front during wartime, is significant in that it provides the commander at the

front or Theatre of Military Operations (TVD) level with an organic, highly mobile, combined-arms striking force capable of conducting operations 20-100km from the line of contact at the outset of hostilities.¹² It is the author's contention that the most logical and likely role of these brigades would be in support of a front-or army-level Operational Maneuver Group (OMG) tasked with conducting deep operations to neutralize and seize major objectives in NATO's rear area.

ENDNOTES

1. U.S. Department of Defense, Soviet Military Power: An Assessment of the Threat, 1986, p. 11.
2. Ibid., p. 74.
3. Graham H. Turbiville, "A Soviet View of Heliborne Assault Operations," Military Review, October 1975, p. 6.
4. Ibid.
5. William P. Baxter, Soviet Airland Battle Tactics, p. 159.
6. David C. Isby, Weapons and Tactics of the Soviet Army, p. 392.
7. Baxter, p. 159.
8. Viktor Suvorov, Inside the Soviet Army, p. 75.
9. Mark L. Urban, Soviet Land Power, p. 67.
10. Steven J. Zaloga and James Loop, Soviet Bloc Elite Forces, p. 12.
11. Chris Bellamy, The Future of Land Warfare, p. 119.
12. ibid., p. 118.

CHAPTER 11

ASSAULT FORCE ORGANIZATIONS

AIRMOBILE BRIGADES

All airmobile brigades, are based away from the central front and are currently located in the Transcaucasus, Transbaikal, and Far East Military Districts. A fourth brigade is believed to be deployed in either the Turkestan or the Central Asian Military District.¹ The airmobile brigade has approximately 1850 personnel and consists of three light rifle battalions, 120mm mortar, 85mm anti-tank gun and anti-aircraft batteries, as well as engineer, reconnaissance and support elements. Each brigade has an organic composite helicopter regiment consisting of two heavy-lift helicopter squadrons (24 MI-6/HOOK) and two medium-lift helicopter squadrons (32 MI-8/HIP).² The rifle battalions lack armored personnel carriers (APCs) except for 13 BRDM scout cars, making them dependent on trucks or airlift for movement. The helicopter lift requirement for a full brigade is 60 HIP and 36 HOOK helicopters.³ The organic lift assets of the brigade are capable of lifting only one-half the brigade simultaneously.⁴

AIR ASSAULT BRIGADES

Air assault brigades are similar to a miniature Soviet airborne division, being somewhat less than half the size. In addition, the brigade appears to be modeled after a BMD (airborne amphibious infantry combat vehicle) equipped airborne regiment.⁵ The brigade has about 2000-2600 personnel and consists of four air assault battalions, an artillery battalion, anti-tank and anti-aircraft batteries, as well as combat support elements (See Annex A).⁶ In contrast to the airmobile brigades, the personnel of the air assault brigades are parachute qualified and are capable of being inserted by airdrop as well as by helicopter. Their expanded capabilities include BMDs for two of the four battalions and the increased firepower of the 122mm howitzer (D-30) battalion as well as the addition of a MI975 Multiple Rocket Launcher (MRL) battery.⁷ Air assault brigades do not have organic lift assets like the airmobile brigades, instead they rely on airlift furnished by the front or allocated from higher commands in the form of Military Transport Aviation (MTA) assets (See Annex B, Fig 1 and 2). They require considerably more airlift than the airmobile brigade, but with its parachute capabilities they have the flexibility of using fixed-wing aircraft (See Annex H). Of the 11 known air assault brigades, all but four are located in Military Districts or Groups of Forces opposite NATO.⁸ They are currently deployed with: Group of Soviet Forces, Hungary, and; the Baltic, Leningrad, Byelorussian, Carpathian, and Odessa Military Districts. The

remaining brigades are located in Afghanistan, the Central Asia Military District and the Far East Military District. The latter has two air assault brigades.

While both the air assault and airmobile brigades are designated as "Desantnii Shturmovaya Brigade"⁹ and have similar overall mission requirements, their differing force structure, firepower, mobility and combat capability indicate there are clear distinctions concerning their specific objectives, anticipated opponents, method of employment and the terrain in which they would be utilized.

AIR ASSAULT BATTALIONS

In addition to the two type brigades previously discussed, the Soviets have formed independent air assault battalions which are thought to be deployed with all forward deployed tank and combined arms armies.¹⁰ The difference in organization and equipment from those of the air assault brigade are mainly differences of scale. These battalions provide the army commanders an airborne or air assault capability that previously would have had to been drawn from subordinate divisions or allocated from higher headquarters. Like the air assault brigades, these battalions lack organic lift capability and depend on army and front support for helicopter transport (See Annex B, Fig 2 and 3).

ENDNOTES

1. Isby, p. 36.
2. Ibid., p. 400.
3. Ibid.
4. Zaloga and Loop, p. 22.
5. Rober E. Bork, "Air Assault Brigades: New Element in the Soviet Dessant Force Structure," Military Review, October 1983, p. 22.
6. Isby, p. 400.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., p. 36.
9. Ibid., p. 391.
10. Ibid.

CHAPTER III

OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Soviet deployment of air assault brigades and battalions has filled a void that previously existed in air assault capability between the tactical and strategic levels of warfare. In addition, they provide the commanders at front and army with a dedicated force capable of supporting their respective DMGs during operations deep in NATO territory.

TACTICAL

At the tactical level, air assaults will be conducted by the trained motorized rifle troops of the division which will conduct operations out of 15-20 kilometers forward of the line of contact in support of division objectives. Although Soviet doctrine maintains that heliborne assaults can be conducted 50 kilometers or more forward of the line of contact, they rarely exceed the range of division artillery and their ability to linkup with advancing friendly forces within hours.¹ This difference in doctrinal theory and practice can be attributed to the lack of mobility and firepower of these forces.² To survive at greater distances, these forces would need their armored vehicles for mobility, artillery and aviation fire support for protection, as well as early linkup with advancing units. The helicopter transport required to accomplish this far exceeds the divisional helicopter squadron's capabilities and would require support from army and front level assets.

STRATEGIC

Airborne forces are expected to fulfill the primary theater warfare role of supporting the rapid advance of a large combined-arms force deep into the enemy's operational or operational-strategic depth.³ According to Soviet doctrine, airborne assaults in support of army and front operations can be conducted at distances of up to 500 kilometers from the FEBA with a force up to division size, although a reinforced regiment would be the most common sized force used to accomplish most operational missions.⁴ Strategic airborne operations usually involve division or multi-division operations planned at theater, or national level, and are relatively rare. Airborne training appears to concentrate heavily on operational missions by battalion to platoon-sized elements with missions of attacking enemy nuclear weapons storage and delivery sites and command and control facilities.⁵

OPERATIONAL

At the operational level of war, air assault brigades give the commander at front level an organic force capable of striking at targets 20-100 kilometers deep in support of operations of the main forces or an OMG.⁶ Operations by these brigades would not alleviate the airborne force requirement for support of frontal operations, but it would greatly reduce them, allowing airborne forces enhanced availability for carrying out missions at greater operational and/or strategic depths.⁷

The increased combat power and mobility afforded by air assault brigades permit them to survive at greater distances from the line of contact for longer periods of time than the lightly equipped motorized rifle forces of the divisions. The mixture of BMD equipped and airborne light infantry battalions provides the commander with a great amount of operational flexibility. If the mission is close to the forward line of troops (FLOT) or within the range of an OMG's fire support assets, the unit will not require a great deal of heavy equipment or vehicles as the situation will favor an early linkup with advancing forces. In this case the lighter armed airborne elements of the brigade could be employed. If the assault force is required to operate at greater distances from the FLOT or the supported OMG and for a longer period of time, the unit selected would probably be a BMD equipped element of the force reinforced with organic artillery for fire support. The mobility, protection and added firepower of the BMD greatly enhances the survivability of the force. In this case, with BMDs, artillery and other combat support assets being required for the mission, the lift requirements will be much greater than with the lightly equipped force.

Because of the multiple missions of the Front Helicopter Transport Regiment it is estimated that simultaneous lift for 500 men would fully tax the front's lift capability. For this, and for other reasons, it is expected the air assault brigade would normally be committed by company to battalion size elements in

support of OMB operations. This is due to the type missions given to air assault units and their need to linkup with advancing forces.⁹

The air assault brigade would support the front OMB in one of three ways. First, the brigade may be integrated into the OMB for movement to cover the flanks or rear and react to rapidly changing situations and counter attacks. This method provides responsive support, but it places the helicopters at great risk from enemy ground fire, fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters.⁷ The second method of support could be from bases located with the main forces where the force would "commute" to the battle zone. In this option, the drawback of the first option would be avoided, but would also sacrifice the advantages. The frequent FLOT crossings that would be required would subject the forces to hostile, and probably friendly air defense fires. Also, the rapid operational tempo of the OMB may cause it to move rapidly beyond helicopter range.¹⁰ The third and most desirable method of support combines both previous options. Initially the force would operate from bases within the main forces. Subsequently, they would not return to their original bases, but would relocate to captured bases or territory occupied by the OMB force and operate from these bases for as long as possible.¹¹ The method used will undoubtedly depend on the overall missions/tasks assigned the OMB, the situation and the desires of the commander.

ENDNOTES

1. U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-2-2, p. 3-1.
2. Bork, p. 28.
3. FM 100-2-2, p. 2-1.
4. Ibid., p. 2-5.
5. Baxter, p. 160.
6. Bellamy, p. 118.
7. Bork, p. 29.
8. "Soviet Armed Forces," Department of Military Strategy, Planning and Operations Reference Text, Academic Year, 89, p. 69.
9. C.N. Donnelly, "The Soviet Helicopter on the Battlefield," International Defense Review, May 1984, p. 563.
10. Ibid., p. 564.
11. Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

MISSIONS

The missions assigned to air assault brigades in support of an OMG would generally be the same as those of the unit they are supporting. OMG missions at the operational level could include:¹

- the destruction of enemy nuclear capabilities.
- destruction or neutralization of enemy air defense systems.
- destruction or disruption of C3 assets.
- seizure of airfields, bridgeheads, and key terrain.
- disruption of lines of communication (LOC) and logistical support.

Air assault brigades in support of an OMG will be assigned high priority objectives whose destruction or seizure is required for the OMG to maintain the advance into the enemy rear area. Likely objectives would be to seize key terrain such as mountain passes, road junctions, airfields and, in particular, river crossing sites.² The use of airborne or helicopter inserted forces to help secure river crossings and other key terrain objectives have been a feature of Soviet large scale exercises since the 1960s.³ Other tasks assigned to the air assault forces could include:⁴

- raid missions designed to destroy high value targets such as nuclear assets, C3 facilities, logistical facilities, and air defense radars.
- seize, control and/or deny key terrain to enemy forces along the OMG axis.

- pursuit of withdrawing enemy forces.
- deception operations (feint, demonstrations, and ruses).
- counter attack enemy reactions to the OMG advance.

An air assault brigade supporting a front OMG could conduct operations as a brigade, but it is most likely that operations would be battalion size or smaller. Conducting operations at the battalion or company level would allow air assault forces to be used against a number of targets at one time. This would be governed by availability of lift assets and command and control capabilities. A battalion or larger size air assault force could be expected to fight independently for up to 48 hours with its organic fire support before linking up with the advancing forces.⁵ This is the same capability a airborne battalion has during operational missions with front or army forces.

ENDNOTES

1. C.J. Dick, "Soviet Operational Maneuver Groups: A Closer Look," International Defense Review, June 1983, p. 773.
2. Bork, p. 29.
3. Isby, p. 391.
4. Jack E. Easton and Charles B. Cook, "Soviet Air Assault," U.S. Army Aviation Digest, November 1985, p. 5.
5. FM 100-2-2, p. 2-2.

CHAPTER V

AIRLIFT ASSETS

The development of Soviet transport helicopters began over 30 years ago and has gained increased emphasis throughout the years. Armed helicopters have been noted in Soviet forces since 1965, with the MI-24/HIND gunship being put into service in the early 1970s.¹ The helicopters most frequently associated with Soviet heliborne assault operations are the MI-8/HIP and the MI-6/HOOK. The MI-6 is currently being replaced by a new heavy-lift helicopter, the MI-26/HALO.²

MI-8/HIP

The MI-8/HIP/C is used primarily as a troop and general cargo transport helicopter. The HIP E variant serves as an armed assault and anti-tank helicopter and is the most heavily armed helicopter in the world (See Annex B, Fig 2).³

MI-6/HOOK

The MI-6/HOOK is a heavy-lift helicopter with the primary mission of transporting heavy equipment and cargo. It is capable of carrying armored cars and other light armored vehicles as well as heavy artillery. Its secondary mission is to transport troops (See Annex E). The MI-6 is presently standard equipment in the heavy-lift squadron of the front-level transport helicopter regiment (See Annex B, Fig 2).⁴

MI-26/HALO

The MI-26 HALO heavy-lift helicopter has been operational since 1982. The cargo area is large enough to carry over 100 troops, two BMDs or one BMP (See Annex F). It is replacing the MI-6/HOOK in the transport helicopter regiment at the front (See Annex B, Fig 2).⁶

The MI-26 HIND helicopter was originally designed to transport a squad of assault troops into battle while providing its own fire support. This original concept has been dropped and the HIND is primarily an assault/attack helicopter.⁶ Hinds are found in the helicopter squadron at division and the attack helicopter regiment at army level (See Annex B, Fig 3).⁷

MILITARY TRANSPORT AVIATION

In addition to the airlift support provided by front and army level aviation, Military Transport Aviation (VTA) supports Soviet doctrine and training for airlift operations up to division size behind NATO lines to facilitate the rapid advance of ground forces.⁸ VTA provides airlift for Soviet airborne units and air assault brigades. The VTA has a fleet of over 600 medium and long range cargo transport aircraft assigned for full-time use. This fleet includes approximately 370 An-12/CUBs, over 170 IL-76/CANDIDS and over 50 AN-22/COCKS (See Annex H). Most VTA aircraft are abased in the Western USSR. Some AN-12 units are based along the southern and far eastern borders of the

Soviet Union.⁹ This concentration of aircraft in the Western USSR places the main VTA assets near the airborne divisions and air assault brigades they would support.¹⁰

During times of military emergency, aircraft of the Soviet civil aviation, Aeroflot, can augment VTA capabilities. The civil fleet is equipped with about 1,100 medium and long-range passenger transports; about 200 AN-12s and IL-76s; and several thousand short range transports and helicopters. Aeroflot aircraft could be used extensively for air landing of troops once airheads are established.¹¹

ENDNOTES

1. Turbiville, p. 5.
2. U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-2-3, p. 5-182.
3. Ibid., p. 5-177.
4. Ibid., p. 5-176.
5. Ibid., p. 5-182.
6. R.A. Mason and John W.R. Taylor, Aircraft, Strategy and Operations of the Soviet Airforce, p. 220.
7. FM 100-2-3, p. 5-180.
8. William J. Lewis, The Warsaw Pact: Arms, Doctrine and Strategy, p. 68.
9. FM 100-2-2, p. 2-3.
10. Ibid., p. 2-4.
11. Ibid.

CHAPTER VI

THE SOVIET AFGHANISTAN EXPERIENCE

At least one air assault brigade and probably an independent air assault battalion are part of the contingent of Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Other air assault units are believed to have rotated in from the Soviet Union for specific operations.¹ The deployment of air assault forces, using the MI-8/HIP helicopter as the primary form of transport, has become a major factor in Soviet anti-guerilla warfare operations. Employed in company to multi-battalion strength during combined-arms operations against Afghan resistance, air assault forces have increasingly become the cutting edge of offensive operations.² They have proven particularly effective in securing key terrain and establishing forward positions during "search and destroy" operations.³ Air assault forces have also played a major role in Soviet day and night interdiction efforts against Afghan supply convoys by conducting ambushes or mopping up after HIND attacks.⁴

Air assault forces have been actively involved in major Soviet operations in Afghanistan including assaults during the Panjshir Valley offensives in 1982 and 1984, operations in the Kundug and Balkh Provinces in 1983, and the establishment of permanent blocking positions on the strategic Anjoman Pass connecting the Panjshir Valley with Badakhsham Province in 1982.⁵ These major operations were designed to wipe out the insurgent strongholds and cut their sources of supply and support.

The Soviet air assault operations in Afghanistan have little if any bearing on implications for NATO as operational concepts are modified to meet the Afghan situation and are conducted mainly at the tactical level of warfare. Nevertheless, the Soviets have been able to examine and test air assault and helicopter applications in combined-arms operations against a non-sophisticated but determined enemy. The lessons learned can be expected to surface during training and in major exercises for future implementation on a Western Europe battlefield.

ENDNOTES

1. Isbv, p. 390.
2. Ibid., p. 84.
3. Edward Girardet, Afghanistan: The Soviet War, p. 43.
4. Isby, p. 439.
5. J. Bruce Amstutz, Afghanistan: The First Five Years of Soviet Occupation, p. 150.

CHAPTER VII
FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

With the existence of air assault brigades in the Military Districts and Groups of Forces opposite NATO, it is unlikely there will be additional brigades added to the force structure. It is likely that increase in the number of air assault battalions will occur to fill those combined arms and tank armies currently lacking this capability. Upgrading of equipment and weapons systems to improve mobility and firepower will be the major changes in the near future. Currently the 120-mm SP 259 Howitzer, with direct and indirect fire capabilities, is replacing towed artillery weapons in the air assault brigades.¹ The on-going replacement of the MI-6/HOOK by the MI-26/HALO will improve the lift capabilities of the front, but not sufficiently enough to meet the lift requirement demands of the front (See Annex C). A likely change could be the addition of a composite helicopter regiment, similar to the one organic to the airmobile brigades, that would be dedicated to the air assault brigades at front-level. The regiment would include assault, (HIND or HOVAC) helicopters as well as transport (HIP and HOOK or HALO) helicopters. It could also include some fixed-wing transport aircraft. This regiment should have the assets capable of conducting multi-battalion air assault operations. This addition would correct the greatest shortcoming currently existing in the operational employment of the air assault brigade.

ENDNOTES

1. Soviet Military Power, 1988, p. 75.

CHAPTER VIII
IMPLICATIONS FOR NATO

Current Soviet operational doctrine calls for the conduct of ground force operations into the depths of NATO rear areas from the outset of hostilities. Soviet emphasis is on the employment of army- and front-level OMGs along several axes into the Central Region to disrupt the cohesiveness of NATO's defenses by forcing them to divert attention and combat resources to the defense of their rear area. Soviet air assault brigades and/or battalions are capable of playing a major role in support of OMGs operating deep in the NATO rear area. Air assault forces will be key in seizing key terrain and eliminating potential mobility obstacles which will allow the OMG to build and maintain the offensive momentum. If these operations are not disrupted or curtailed, they will ultimately lead to the widespread fragmentation and collapse of NATO defenses.

The current peacetime deployment of NATO forces makes the alliance vulnerable to surprise attack as allied forces depend on a period of at least a week to prepare and deploy formations for war.¹ In addition, the problem presented by the lack of depth in the Central Region due to NATO's commitment to forward defense as well as the lack of in-place strategic or even operational reserves offer opportunities to the Soviets to conduct the deep operations they desire.²

With the problems mentioned above and the Soviets continuing development of operational concepts, force structure and weapon modernizations which stress fast-moving offensive operations, presents NATO planners with a magnitude of problems for dealing with large combined-arms formations operating throughout the depths of NATO within the first few days of the war. Security problems will be further complicated by the employment of other rear area threats such as airborne forces and Spetsnaz from the outset of hostilities. Much attention and planning has been devoted to the task of attacking Soviet follow-on forces of the second echelon before they can be committed into the battle. More attention and planning must be devoted to the threat once a breakthrough is conducted and a large combined-arms force (OMG) with all its supporting elements begin operating in NATO's rear area, attempting to destroy or seize critical nodes which could cause NATO's rapid collapse. These operations into NATO's rear area can only be successful on a fluid battlefield if the Soviets are willing to risk exposure to the rear and flanks of the force and abandon their lines of communication. NATO security planners will have to eliminate, reduce or provide sufficient protection to those critical nodes which, if destroyed or seized, could lead to a quick Soviet victory. Another defense against deep-operating forces would be to establish a well organized defense in depth. If OMGs or other deep operating forces are quickly subjected to attrition on their flanks and rear, and lines of communication are non-existent, life will be short for the OMG and the cost to the Soviets high.

The challenge for NATO planners is to appreciate the capabilities and roles Soviet air assault forces will play in a future war with NATO and develop countermeasures with existing resources and capabilities that will negate the advantage the Soviets seek from their employment.³

ENDNOTES

1. C.J. Dick, "Soviet Operational Concepts," Part 1. Military Review, September 1985, p. 45.

2. Ibid., pp. 44-45.

3. Henry S. Shields, "Soviet Armed Helicopters," Military Review, February 1985, p. 68.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSIONS

Since the 1950s, heliborne operations have occupied a key role in Soviet military theory and practice. The continuing development of helicopters and the formation of air assault units reflect the interest and confidence Soviet leaders have in these forces and their application. The air assault brigades represent a significant increase in front-level capabilities. They provide the commander with an organic force capable of conducting operational level missions in support of front operations from the outset of hostilities, without having to depend on Ministry of Defense/General Staff controlled airborne forces.

The mobility and firepower of these brigades allow the commander to plan and operate with these forces at greater distances and for longer periods of time before linkup. Although they are capable of performing a variety of missions, they will probably perform certain types of missions more frequently than others such as seizing key terrain and eliminating maneuver obstacles critical to a successful advance of an OMG.

Air assault forces have proven to be a capable and effective force in Afghanistan. These forces possess a tremendous potential for future employment against the NATO rear area. Their chief problem lies in the existing shortage of airlift at the front-level that would be dedicated to the brigades operating

in support of an OMG deep in the NATO rear area. This is a problem Soviet leaders and planners must resolve if the full effect of the front-level air brigades are to be achieved.

Soviet capabilities to execute successful air assault operations 30-100 km from the line of contact is, of course, arguable. Soviet planners will recognize the vulnerabilities of such operations in the face of determined and effective defending forces. However, given evidence from doctrinal writings, as well as air assault force employment in exercises and in Afghanistan, it seems likely that Soviet planners will commit air assault forces in conjunction with OMGs in an effort to facilitate high speed advances into NATO's rear area. As a consequence, evolving Soviet air assault operational concepts and capabilities deserve careful and continuing attention from NATO defense planners to develop appropriate counter measures.

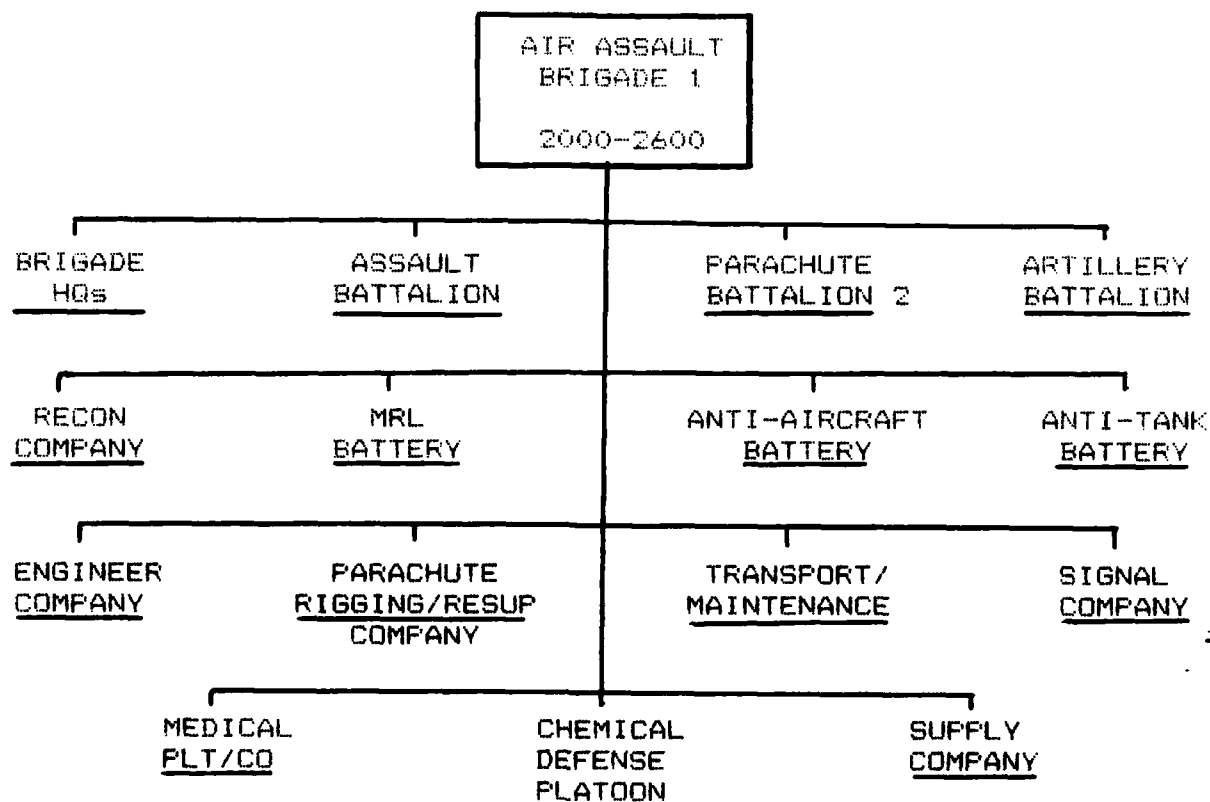
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ANNEX A



PRINCIPLE ITEMS OF EQUIPMENT

EQUIPMENT

D-30, 122-mm Howitzer³18
 M-1975, MRL.6
 120mm Mortar, M1943.24
 SAM, SA-7 or SA-14.45
 23mm AA Gun, ZU-23⁴.6
 ATGM Lchr Veh(BRDM-2)AT-3/5. 9
 AAICV, BMD64

EQUIPMENT

73mm Recoilless AT Gun, SPG-9. . . .36
 85mm Aux-Propel AT Gun, SD-44. . . .6
 ATGL, RPG-16D150
 30mm Auto Ger Lchr, AGS-17.24
 AT-3/4 ATGM Manpack Consol.14
 5.45mm LMG, RPKS-74.111
 ASC, BRDM/BRDM-2.4

NOTES:

1. Sources:
Isby, Weapons and Tactics of the Soviet Army.
FM-2-3.
2. Some brigades have 3 light and one BMD equipped battalion.
3. The 2S9 SP 120mm Howitzer is replacing the D-30 towed Howitzers.
4. SA-9 may be replacing the ZU-23.

ANNEX A

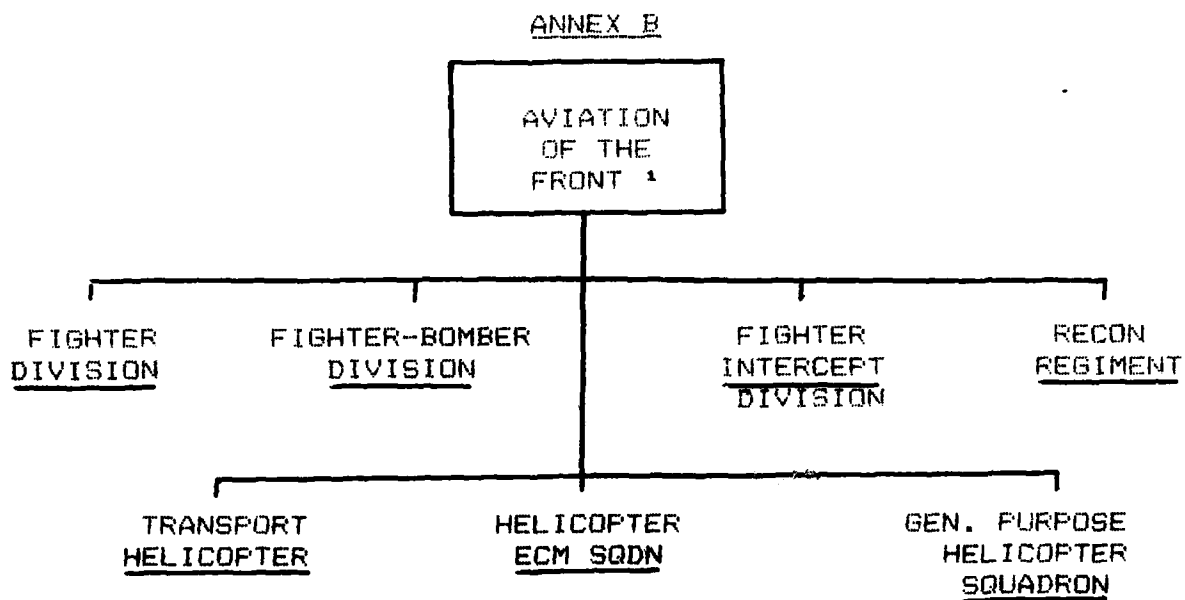


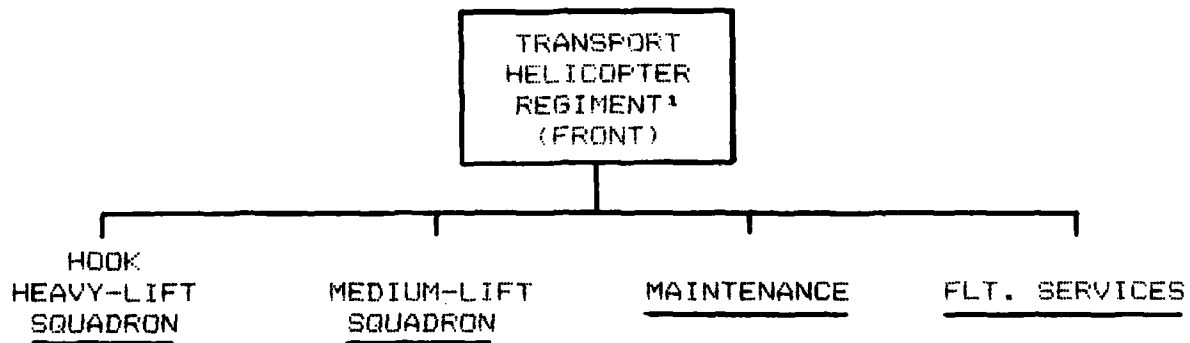
FIGURE 1

NOTES:

1. Sources:

Isby, Weapons and Tactics of the Soviet Army.
FM 100-2-3.

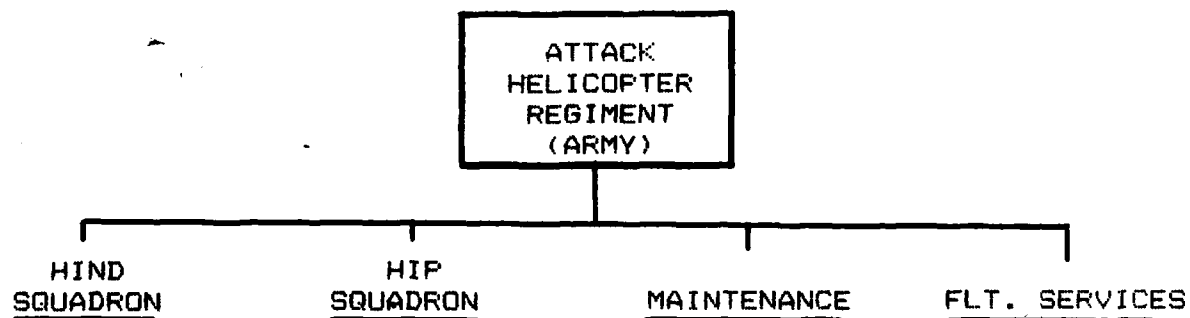
ANNEX B
ANNEX B



PRINCIPLE ITEMS OF EQUIPMENT

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Heavy-Lift Helicopter, MI-6/HOOK or MI-26/HALO A. | .24 |
| Medium Helicopter, MI-8/HIP C or E. | .32 |

FIGURE 2



PRINCIPLE ITEMS OF EQUIPMENT

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----|
| Attack Helicopter, MI-24/HIND D or E. | .40 |
| Attack Helicopter, MI-8/HIP C or E. | .20 |

FIGURE 3

NOTES:

1. Sources:

Isby, Weapons and Tactics of the Soviet Army.
FM 100-2-3.

ANNEX C

LIFT REQUIREMENTS
SOVIET AIR ASSAULT BRIGADE¹

| <u>ELEMENT</u> | <u>EQUIPMENT</u> | <u>HELICOPTER REQs.</u> |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| FULL BRIGADE | NO BMDs | 75 HIP, 35 HOOK |
| FULL BRIGADE | WITH BMDs | 41 HIP, 125 HOOK |
| RIFLE BATTALION | NO BMDs | 13 HIP |
| RIFLE BATTALION | WITH BMDs | 37 HOOK |
| ARTILLERY BN. | 18 D-30s, w/Prime Movers and Crews | 24 HOOK |
| AIR DEFENSE BTRY. | 6 ZU-23, w/Prime Movers and Crew | 6 HOOK |
| RECON COMPANY | NO BMDs | 2 HIP |
| RECON COMPANY | WITH BMDs | 4 HOOK |
| ENGINEER COMPANY | Vehicles & Personnel | 3 HOOK |
| BRIGADE HQs | Personnel | 3 HIP |
| SUPPORT ELEMENTS | Personnel | 4 HIP |

NOTES:

1. Sources: Isby, Weapons and Tactics of the Soviet Army.

ANNEX D

MI-8/HIP

TRANSPORT AND GENERAL PURPOSE HELICOPTER

SERVICE INTRODUCTION

1967

USE TRANSPORT, ATTACK, CARGO AND GENERAL PURPOSE ROLES

PERFORMANCE

| | |
|-----------------|-----------|
| CRUISE SPEED | 122KTs |
| MAXIMUM SPEED | 135KTs |
| SERVICE CEILING | 14,760 FT |
| HOVER CEILING | |
| IGE | 6,235 FT |
| OGE | 2,625 FT |
| RANGE | 465 KM |

PAYLOAD

| | |
|--------------|----------------------------|
| TROOPS | 24 Combat Equipped (Hip C) |
| | 14 Combat Equipped (Hip E) |
| MAX INTERNAL | 8,820 LBs |
| MAX EXTERNAL | 6,614 LBs |
| CREW | 2-3 |

ORDNANCE (HIP E)

4 each SWATTER AT MISSILES
192 57mm ROCKETS (6 PODS-32 ROCKETS/POD)
1 12.7 NOSE MOUNTED MACHINE GUN
4 each 250 KG or 2 each 500 KG BOMBS

NOTES:

1. Sources:

FM 100-2-3

Mason and Taylor, Aircraft, Strategy and Operations of
the Soviet Air Force.

Polmar and Kennedy, Military Helicopters of the World.

ANNEX D

ANNEX E

MI-6/HOOK
HEAVY TRANSPORT HELICOPTER

SERVICE INTRODUCTION

1960

USE HEAVY LIFT, TROOP TRANSPORT AND AIRBORNE COMMAND POST

PERFORMANCE

| | |
|------------------|-----------|
| CRUISE SPEED | 135Kts |
| MAXIMUM SPEED | 162Kts |
| SERVICE CEILING | 14,770 FT |
| RANGE | 620 KM |
| RANGE W/EXTERNAL | 1,000 KM |

PAYLOAD

| | |
|--------------|------------|
| MAX INTERNAL | 26,450 LBs |
| MAX EXTERNAL | 17,637 LBs |
| MAX TROOPS | 70 |
| CREW | 5 |

ORDNANCE

12.7 mm NOSE MOUNTED MACHINE GUN

NOTES:

1. Sources:

FM 100-2-3

Mason and Taylor, Aircraft, Strategy and Operations of
the Soviet Air Force.

Polmar and Kennedy, Military Helicopters of the World.

ANNEX F

MI-26/HALO
HEAVY LIFT HELICOPTER

SERVICE INTRODUCTION

1983

USE HEAVY EQUIPMENT, CARGO AND TROOP TRANSPORT

PERFORMANCE

| | |
|-----------------|-----------|
| CRUISE SPEED | 135Kts |
| MAXIMUM SPEED | 159Kts |
| SERVICE CEILING | 15,000 FT |
| HOVER CEILING | |
| OGE | 5,900 FT |
| RANGE | 800 KM |

PAYLOAD

| | |
|--------------|--------------------|
| MAX INTERNAL | 44,090 LBs |
| MAX TROOPS | 85 Combat Equipped |
| CARGO/EQUIP | 2 AICVs; 1 BMP |

ORDNANCE

NONE KNOWN

NOTES:

1. Sources:

FM 100-2-3

Mason and Taylor, Aircraft, Strategy and Operations of
the Soviet Air Force.

Polmar and Kennedy, Military Helicopters of the World.

ANNEX G

MI-24/HIND
ATTACK HELICOPTER

SERVICE INTRODUCTION

1972

USE ATTACK, ANTI-TANK, ANTI-HELICOPTER CLOSE AIR SUPPORT
 AND OTHER ASSAULT ROLES

PERFORMANCE

(HIND D)

| | |
|-----------------|-----------|
| CRUISE SPEED | 159Kts |
| MAXIMUM SPEED | 173Kts |
| SERVICE CEILING | 14,750 FT |
| HOVER CEILING | |
| OGE | 7,200 FT |
| COMBAT RADIUS | 160 KM |

PAYLOAD

| | |
|--------|-------------------------------|
| TROOPS | 8 Combat Equipped or 4 Litter |
| CREW | 4 |

ORDNANCE

- 1 Four-Barrell 12.7mm Gattling Machinegun
- 4 57mm Rocket Pods (32 RKTS per pod)
- 4 SWATTER ANTI-TANK Guided Missiles
- 1 TWIN BARREL 23 mm GUN
- 4 250 kg BOMBS or 2 500 Kg BOMBS

NOTES:

1. Sources:

FM 100-2-3

Mason and Taylor, Aircraft, Strategy and Operations of
the Soviet Air Force.

Polmar and Kennedy, Military Helicopters of the World.

ANNEX H

SOVIET MILITARY TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT

| AIRCRAFT TYPE | MAXIMUM PASSENGERS (TRPS) (PARACHUTE) | MAXIMUM PAYLOAD (MT) | MAXIMUM RANGE (KM) | MAX FUEL RANGE (KM) | CRUISE SPEED (KT's) |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| AN-12 CUB | 90 | 20 | 1400 | 5700 | 361 |
| IL-76 CANDID | 140 | 40 | 5300 | 6700 | 432 |
| AN-22 COCK | 175 | 80 | 5000 | 10,950 | 399 |
| AN-124 CANDOR | 345 | 125 | 4500 | 16,500 | 459 |

EQUIPMENT AIRDROP/AIRLAND CAPABILITY
(SELECTED EQUIPMENT)

| ITEM | CUB | CANDID | COCK |
|------------------|-----|--------|------|
| BMD/BRDM | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| D-30, 122 mm How | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| GAZ 66 Vehicle | - | 3 | 4 |

NOTES:

- Sources:
FM 100-2-3.
Mason Taylor, Aircraft, Strategy and Operations of the Soviet Air Force.

ANNEX H